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ABSTRACT

The four lectures in this publication were composed with the common concern for making the study of high school English more effective and more delightful. Papers are (1) "Robert Frost's Chicken Feathers" by C. W. Geyer (discusses the influence of oral folklore and humor on Frost's poetry); (2) "Nature in Literature" by Gerhard T. Alexis; (3) "Understanding 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'" by Donald R. Fryxell; and (4) "The Class-Made Film as a Motivation to Writing" by Arthur R. Huseboe. (JM)

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ROBERT FROST'S CHICKEN FEATHERS

and Other Lectures from the 1968 Augustana College NDEA English Institute

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To H. M. Blegen and Herbert Krause for inspiration at any distance.

FOREWORD

The four lectures in this collection were composed for a very special audience, the forty-three high-school teachers who made up the NDEA English Institute at Augustana College during the summer of 1968. As late-afternoon digressions from the rigors of the daily schedule, the four were warmly received, and the subsequent requests for printed copies led me to believe that they deserved a wider audience. I saw the publication of these lectures, moreover, as my last official act as director, as a reminder of what had turned out to be a lively and occasionally pleasant summer, and as a tribute to the patience, intellect, and hard work of my colleagues and to the enthusiasm, adaptability, and dedication of a remarkable group of secondary teachers.

The range of content among these papers is too great for me to pretend that they have any connection other than their common concern for making more effective and more delightful the study of English. In addition, they range in tone from the easy bonhomie of Bill Geyer's "Chicken Feathers" to the painstaking thoroughness of Don Fryxell's explication of T. S. Eliot's "Prufrock." Yet for all their diversity, the four papers appear in print essentially as they were delivered, sharing an informality of phrase and a frequent use of second person, and in their brevity and literary undress entirely deserving the sobriquet "mini-lectures."

The publication of this monograph is the first in what may someday be a series of works under the name of the Augustana College Press. Although it has as yet no existence in fact, a Press has long been a dream for many members of the faculty; and I wish to express my gratitude to Dean William Matthews for encouraging as much of the dream as appears between these covers. To many others on

campus I owe a debt of thanks: to the members of the Faculty Studies and Research Committee for the publication grant--Ronald L. Jorgensen, Donald Sneen, Delores Henne, Robert D. Mabbs, and O. S. Sigurdson; to President Charles L. Balcer and the Board of Regents for allocating the funds for the grant program.

To the staff of the 1968 Institute I owe the idea for this collection: to Alexis, Fryxell, and Geyer; to Eloise Courter, our grammarian; to Paul Graves, Marian Pfaff, and Vera Sadler, our workshop leaders; to Mary Thorstenson, our materials librarian; to Grace Schwenke, our secretary; to the participants; and to my wife Doris, a member of my staff long before there were institutes.

A. R. H.

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Robert Frost's Chicken Feathers

by

C. W. Geyer

Since I learned that this was to be recorded for the perusal and/or brickbats of posterity, I decided that I'd better limit myself to something of a text and that in turn might help me to limit myself to something of a half hour. When Dr. Alexis, Dr. Fryxell, and I were queued up outside of the office of Our Director, eager to volunteer ourselves for these half-hour-or-so exposures and wrestling with the angels of academic protocol as to who should be first, we were relieved to discover that that problem too had been resolved by the same deft hand that had summoned us there in the first place. Disarming as always, Our Director said, "Stand at ease, gentlemen, and sound off with your topics as I call off your names."

This atmosphere of easy bonhomie notwithstanding, you can imagine Our Director's reaction when, from parade rest, I snapped, "Robert Frost's Chicken Feathers." Betraying barely a hint of his unalloyed enthusiasm for my inventiveness and painstakingly thought-out subject, Our Director inquired, pleasantly, "Do you spell that with or without a hyphen, clown?" Someone in the immediate vicinity tried to help by noting that I was probably just planning a scholarly sequel to our film on John Updike by offering a transition from *Pigeon Feathers* to feathers of a different bird. It should be remarked nevertheless that even at this point no diaphragms were reported damaged by immoderate laughter.

Of course I jest. For it's common knowledge that no one vaguely concerned with the governance of this institute would think of making inordinate demands upon leisure time. It was in fact in keeping with this spirit that I chose the topic "Chicken Feathers." I said to myself, "Why spoil an otherwise restful and somnolent day by following the in-class

essay in Literature and Composition and the exam in Linguistics with something heavy?" And what could be lighter, more diaphanous, I ask you, than chicken feathers? Moreover, the silver-tongued recording star of the United States Senate, Everett Dirksen, reminded me that diaphanous speaking was much in vogue. Your might recall that Senator Dirksen recently scolded,* albeit with usual mellifluousness, one of his colleagues for having earlier chastised President Johnson about his appointments to the federal judiciary. Senator Dirksen did this by calling his colleague's speech "diaphanous." A newsman informed the Senator that his colleague seemed blanched and shaken by having learned that he was speaking diaphanously. And would the grandiloquent Mr. Dirksen bother to define his term? The Senator obliged: There were no hard feelings in it. Why, he said, "diaphanous" is a perfectly respectable term to apply to any ill-considered speech wanting in thought and so thin as to be translucent. Thus, you see, "Chicken Feathers" seemed a natural selection for me--inevitable almost--and was not plucked, as it were, out of thin air.

In fact, this whole chain of rather flimsy associations that I've been rattling off have, in my mind at least, a sort of left-handed pertinence to the topic I've chosen. For what I'd like to talk to you about is a series of happy accidents and associations that helped me discover something of importance and something very fascinating about the poet Robert Frost. The important thing that I discovered is this: that Robert Frost had an early, abortive, but very significant career (especially in terms of the poetry to come later) as a writer of short stories--eleven of them, from 1903 to 1905, and all of them by and large and more or less concerned with chicken feathers. During those years Frost published in New England poultry journals stories and sketches meant to

*as of summer 1968 and this lecture.

supplement the income of his young family, and these stories, as it turned out, were to have very rich implications for his art. But I had a rather painful time discovering this, and so really what I want to talk to you about is research-the-hard-way, or negative examples in research technique, or there-must-be-better-ways-of-doing-it-than-this.

I was quite sure that the popular image of Frost as avuncular philosopher, whose distinguishing quality was poetic ease, was incorrect. And I knew that his attitudes and theories of poetry didn't seem quite the second wash of Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that they were sometimes charged with being. I already knew before I started this project--and it didn't amount to a project until I bumped my toes on a few accidental facts--that Robert Frost held out great hopes for what he called man's audial imagination. To him, audial imagination meant an ear for distinguishing speech tones, the dramatic tones of voice, and applying these to poetry. Robert Frost always disclaimed being a dialect poet, and indeed he wasn't one. If you read through his poetry for samplings of New England dialect, you're simply not going to find many dialectal words. Instead, Frost was after the sound of the sentence as people speak it, as they gossip it. He was after that tense sort of harmony we get as we communicate with one another. So his dialogue poems. Robert Frost called the sounds of folk sentences the "real cave things" of American speech, and it was these he sought to incorporate into his poetry.

I thought, as I read the poetry of Frost, that there emerged a kind of theory of communication which, to me, seemed both absorbing and accurate. Frost argued in his poems that man's communication was nearly always an incomplete affair, incomplete for the very reason that as we communicate we retain a sense of personal priority; we don't want to give up all of ourselves to our auditor. So we hide

behind speech masks, dramatic postures, tones, and never fully expose our character. Frost thought that it was the poet's business to go behind the person as he is "a-sentencing" in order to expose his character more fully.

With this in mind, I was rather surprised to stumble on some facts that might at first glance appear trivial, but given my interest in Frost, proved very germane. I was attending one of those Southern faculty parties, which in social orientation could be described as some distance to the left of quiescent and dignified scholarly rectitude and a shade to the right of out-and-out revelry. I was talking to a faculty member from the university, an associate professor, deep in his cups and on his favorite subject--his publications. Since his publications consisted largely of getting his foot in the door of the casebook industry, he didn't have a whole lot to talk about. Still he was zealous. What he wanted to do was to compare his rich achievement with that of another colleague who had departed the university in disgrace, having published only one thing. "Old Barker," he noted cheerfully, "just lacked the goods. In the business ten years, and published only this snippet in the *Journal of American Folklore*." And he named the article, "just a piddling note on Robert Frost." Apparently both Barker and Frost were considered of small enough wattage not to diminish his own incandescence, never intended by him for hiding under a bushel.

I recall thinking a peck would have done nicely. Well, Addison Barker couldn't be all wrong, if he had made such an enemy. I would look into this later. And I did and found Barker's piddling note was to this effect: that Robert Frost's statement in "Mending Wall"--"Good fences make good neighbors"--is really a proverb that has had a good deal of currency in oral communication. Barker had discovered that this maxim was published in an almanac as early as 1828. This was to me provocatively nonpiddling. What if Frost's theory of sound of sense, of dramatic speech postures, actually owed

a good deal to his having imbibed native American humor almost wholesale? What if his alleged cracker-barrel quality really owed to a long and painstaking apprenticeship in the oral tradition of American humor?

You know something of what I mean when I talk about oral tradition in American humor: the thing that we identify by the labels Humor of the Old Southwest or Down East Humor, the thing that appeared in almanacs, Davy Crockett tales, for example, or the rich masculine yarns that appeared in a periodical like *Spirit of the Times* (a sort of combination modern-day *Playboy* and *Farmer's Almanac,* with a few sporting journals tossed in for leaven). These stories, full of horseswapping and shouting and drinking and fighting and laconic jibes at hypocritical parsons and marvelous shell games of sly Yankee pedlars--what if Frost knew them, knew them well, and they influenced his poetry? It was merely a hope, just a little whistling in the dark, and it was inverting normal research procedure, I admit. Nevertheless that's the way it did begin. And as I started to investigate, I learned that an author's use of the framework device in his stories or poems and his employment of sentences with a proverbial grain are pretty good reasons to suspect that there has been a profound influence from oral tradition. So I began shopping about with this filed mentally, now feeling the urgency of reading all and anything about Frost's formative years. But I didn't much relish the task, because what I had read of Frost's biography had pretty much corroborated the stereotype of benign, avuncular poet.

When I ran across a book with the unlikely and uninviting title, *Robert Frost: Farm-Poultryman,* I remember muttering, "Should I, should I really? Oh well, I suppose one is obliged to." And as I began reading, I found that I didn't have hold of a biography at all. I was into a book of Frost's short stories, sketches, and yarns, very much in the tradition of Old Southwestern Humor. Moreover, the very best of them seemed able to stand unashamedly beside stories in a period-

ical like *Spirit of the Times*. This of course delighted me. To suggest something of my sense of discovery and elation, I will recount for you one of Frost's stories on the general theme of chicken feathers. It's called "Old Welch Goes to Show."

Old Welch is a character who likes to display hens and roosters at poultry contests--you know, New England versions of Miss or Mister Universe pageants in chickendom. And he is engaged in this to such an extent that he has become a real swapper of chickens, a cleverly bartering Yankee pedlar who isn't above the most underhanded scheme to enhance his birds for show or trade. "Old Welch Goes to Show" is the story of a disconsolate reprobate, who finds that he doesn't have any chickens to display since the year has been a particularly bad one. Frost puts it this way: "His first hatches were so exceptionally fine that the gods fell in love with them, and they died young." So poor Welch had no chickens to show. But he was not one to be put off easily. In fact, he had a reputation in the circle of poulterers for adroitly doctoring any bird the slightest down-at-heel. That one was not supposed to pluck any feathers from a show bird did not bother Welch in the least. His conscience was not one to ride him heavily, and if his birds grew with "legs as fringed as a cowboy's," he would merely corrupt the young boys who were working for him into plucking the birds so that they had the shining underpinnings preferred by poultry judges. No trick of the trade was missed by the boys under Welch's tutelage: They would bleach, with chloride of lime, the white Wyandotte to make it appear even more resplendent. Where nature had been neglectful of the finer points, Welch's craft and industry took over. And to the boys who learned at the feet of the master, there was no tuition, except that they do all the work.

Yet despite Welch's energy and strategy, he is during the season of our story without bird to show. Opportunely a youth spots a yellowish ramshackle fowl, hardly the pure white that it need be for contest, and he challenges Welch

to do something with that bird. As Frost describes it, the bird has a comb that doesn't fit, eyes that don't mate, a chest that is hollow, a back that is whale-humped, and legs which ain't. The challenge seems insurmountable, but the temptation is equally great. And Welch, of course, succumbs. He first impresses the boys with the difficulty of the task before him, and he vows, as a fair demonstration of his powers of "grooming and taming," that he will renovate this bird. The comb is made to conform with the head by searing it on the underside with a hot wire to even it out; the legs are polished with butter color; an oculist is procured to transform the Wyandotte's one yellow eye to the red of its companion, though the boys are later heard to remark that he doesn't see so well out of one side; Welch inflates the bird's sagging torso with a bicycle pump, puffing the rooster to proud size; and finally he fits the bird with a corset. After a two-week imprisonment in this contraption, the bird emerges and is pronounced by its groomer and tamer just right, considering its mean beginning. So he takes it to show and wins a red ribbon. At this point the framework narrator interjects (since this is a frame story, in which a narrator of more sophisticated consciousness talks about a tale that is being told to him) that it might as well have been a blue ribbon. It wouldn't have taxed any more severely the inventiveness of the boy who told him the tale.

This is delightful fare and would fit comfortably in *Spirit of the Times.* As I thought about this story, I felt that these lads who were under Welch's direction reminded me a good deal of those boys about whom Mark Twain speaks in his autobiography, those who gathered before Tom Blankenship, who was, as you recall, the model for Huckleberry Finn, boys who were anxious for the company of the son of the town drunkard: "And as his society was forbidden us by our parents, the prohibition trebled and quadrupled its value." So with the boys who came to pay court to the old poulterer's remarkable machinations.

Also I was impressed at this being a frame story--with the possibility, then, of its having larger oral currency. And I got to thinking of other stories that I'd read in the same vein: Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's tale of horseswapping from *Georgia Scenes,* Mark Twain's jocose discussion of the "Genuine Mexican Plug" from *Roughing It,* Faulkner's Ab Snopes-Pat Stamper horse-trade from *The Hamlet.* The Faulkner tale sounded especially similar. In plot, Faulkner and Frost seemed to have read over one another's shoulders. But there was no possibility of that, of course. What Faulkner talks about in his splendid yarn from the beginning of *The Hamlet* is a horse trader who has invaded a Southern community with his legerdemain, causing all of the males to bristle with the challenge offered their skill as horsemen. Ab Snopes, a tenant farmer, decides to take action. With a horse which he has acquired by swapping away some of his landlord's farm machinery, he goes to town to talk trade. But first he does a little doctoring of the animal, a little grooming and taming. He places a fishhook under its collar so that just before they reach town, and upon his giving the reins a tug, the horse will come alive, break out in a frothy sweat, and transform itself into a shining bay, stomping into town with all the fury of a stallion. Actually, the horse is a worthless plug. However, Pat Stamper agrees to a trade, on the condition that he also receive the mule that had been pulling the wagon with the horse. Ab Snopes, who has gone into town with the money his wife had saved to buy a separator, feels he has made a real bargain: two matched mules for one worthless horse and one pretty good mule. But the mules weren't the matched team that Pat Stamper's art had made them out to be; they melt in the harness. One of them decides on an alternate route from its partner, so that they bolt and Ab discovers that they have literally hanged themselves in the traces. Thus it is that he must again talk trade with Pat Stamper. The latter notes that while he does not especially want the "matched" mules

back, he is willing to make a swap--on his terms, which this time costs Mrs. Snopes her separator for a shining and plump horse. But poor Ab is willing to come away with any sort of bargain, and so starts back toward home with his newly acquired and rather too stout animal. And under a melancholy rain, the horse begins to change color from its original blackness to a bay. Likewise, its fattiness when probed goes of a sudden with a great hiss. The horse, you see, had been inflated with a bicycle pump and colored with shoe dye, and Ab had reclaimed his plug.

You can observe the rich parallel here, and it seemed to me that there was the possibility of oral lore having broadcast some sort of archetypal story from which both authors had borrowed. I began then to investigate this possibility, a possibility inspired by chicken feathers, and discovered just how much of a part oral lore played in the sound of sense theory and the dramatic speech tones of Robert Frost's poetic art. Ergo, a researcher's moral: Never underestimate the value of a chicken plume. To think all this started with a diaphanous feather wafted downward from a chicken in its flight, to bend slightly a line from a lesser American poet.

Nature In Literature

by

Gerhard T. Alexis

I know that, on the face of it, dealing with nature in literature in thirty minutes or so is an impossible assignment, and it may seem more odd that I have chosen this topic myself. What I have in mind, however, is not to deal with nature in literature in terms of information; this would be indeed an impossible task. I am concerned with a pedagogical problem, one that confronts us each day in our classrooms as we find poetry or fiction that has nature as the subject. This has been surely one of the most pervasive themes in the literature of our western world, treated in different ways by many writers; yet we come to it now in a period in which the reader is almost totally alienated from that world of nature.

This thought came to mind the other day as our section studied several of the poems in the anthology. Perhaps I could illustrate what I have in mind by taking a couple of lines from "A Canticle to the Waterbirds":

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And from another poem, Elizabeth Bishop's this time, "A Cold Spring," just these passages:

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It would seem natural to assume that these contemporary writers take for granted that some of these observations of nature touch a responsive chord in the minds and hearts of the reader. Do they? "Song sparrows," we read, "were wound up for the summer." What does that passage mean to us if we haven't the slightest idea of what a song sparrow looks like or, what is more important here, sounds like? The observation will be meaningless to us if we cannot see or hear the bird at all. Or the "complementary cardinal" in the maple? The cardinal's brilliant red may be thought of as complementary to the foliage of the maple, and certainly those whistles of the cardinal, clear, shrill, repeated, can be thought of as cracking a whip, but again, one must know the cardinal. The passage, "Tufts of long grass show where each cowflop lies" -- in my boyhood summers in Northern Michigan the proper term was "cowpie." And whether it's "cowpie" or "cowflop" what we find is close enough observation of somebody's pasture, at any rate, to suggest that this particular source of nutrient has led to the long blades of grass, benefiting from the chemicals, a homey observation of nature which would have meant something to people who had cows. What can it mean now to the person whose only recognition of cattle consists of the Children's Farm at the State Fair where there's a miniature barnyard where all the once-familiar domesticated animals may be seen?

In short, what I'm suggesting is that the centuries in which the nature poetry has been written find us, as readers, very much at a loss. What is the concept of nature in our time? With what resources do we approach any writing dealing with nature? In America, particularly, the tradition has not been one of enjoying nature, or of communing with nature; Thoreaus have been the odd exceptions in our history. Our history, rather, has been one of exploitation, and, if you will, plundering. For us, progress and plunder were almost synonymous. We have worked for years under the American myth of the inexhaustible resources; there were always to be forests enough and game enough. There would never be an end to the water, to the minerals, to the oil. And so we have stripped our lands, we have polluted our air, and spoiled our water; we have decimated our game, birds, and animals alike. We live in a world, now, of concrete jungles, large or small, detached from the world of nature, because as one poet put it, "All is seared and bleared," or as his predecessor had it, "The world is too much with us."

Even our attempts to return to nature are somewhat amusing rather than moving. Families gather their gear together and go off camping to be close to nature, and you will find them under the highly illuminated Coleman lanterns ringed in a circle about the portable TV set, with its magic show going on amidst the pines as it had in the family drawing room. And the convivial circles of quickly-made neighbors and friends, in the campsites, gathering around for chatter amidst the clank of the beercans, and the crashing of bottles, are our return to nature. The concrete highways open up lakes and streams whose edges are soon littered with the debris of a thousand campfires and garbage piles. Nor do we have any greater consideration of these birds of which the poet has been singing, whether it's the killdeers or the cormorants of the poem about the West Coast, or the song sparrow and cardinal in New England. For we continue

to exploit and to kill. Not long ago on the radio I heard the game laws of South Dakota read off in connection with the mourning doves; so many mourning doves allowed per day, so many in possession. My picture of the mourning dove is of a peaceful, somewhat stupid bird, hardly able to build a decent nest, certainly not a very wily bird. But I suppose if the mighty Nimrods of our time have no more pheasants to go after, no more grouse, they may as well aim their pieces at the inoffensive mourning dove, and continue the tradition of the mighty hunter in our twentieth century.

But this is hardly understanding or appreciating nature; it's just showing one's skill in shooting something. The same thought came to mind a few months ago as I was hearing of a wolverine killed in my native state of Minnesota. The animal had been thought extinct for over thirty years; I believe the last record of one was somewhere in the '30's. But within the past year a hunter found one in a northern county and shot it. And it led not to the feeling of blame on anybody's part, but to a radio announcer's observation that, "Well, maybe there was one left, but now you've got that one, haven't you?" Almost praise and approbation for finding one more wolverine to shoot. I spent some summers in Glacier Park as an employee years ago, and while there were some occasional brushes with the bears, no one was killed in the summers I was out there. This past year, however, in two detached incidents in the same night, two young women were killed by grizzlies, and from the citizens of Montana, or at least some of them, came the suggestion to kill off the grizzlies.

In short, we're living in a world in which nature is a temporary spectacle for the jaded vacationer but where it is difficult to imagine any true appreciation or communion. The student in the classroom reflects his time; he is at home in his culture, an urban, industrialized, technological culture,

and while a picture of some forest scene may seem to be proper decoration in a commonplace home, how, really, can we be prepared to find significance in the natural world as presented in a long literary tradition?

I'm not sure, frankly, what the answer to this is. I do think that as teachers we can at least get the student to understand that the view of nature on the part of the writer was not always the same. In short, part of what we can do in the study of poetry or other literary forms dealing with nature is to suggest that we meet each writer half way and attempt to understand how he was dealing with it. We aren't compelled to agree with him, we may not totally understand or appreciate him, but we should know, at least, what he is trying to say, from what premise he is writing. Look, then, if you will, at some of the representative periods and attitudes in which distinctions in attitudes toward nature can be legitimately made.

We've been reading *Oedipus* within the last few weeks. Here we have the world of the Greek. What does nature mean here? It is not something that leads men out to find ecstatic enjoyment in it, commonly, though there are passages in the *Odyssey* and elsewhere in which there is a ready aesthetic appreciation of the beauties of natural growth. The gardens in Phaeacia are rather attractive. But, in general, what we find in the Greek world is a move away from animism so that the forces of nature, so long feared as malign, become less frightening by being represented by recognizable figures: gods and goddesses and various types of other supernatural beings, with whom one gets in some kind of communication. The sea, perhaps, is less dreadful if behind it is the god of the sea, Poseidon, to whom one might pray, to whom one might offer sacrifices, who could be induced, perhaps, to get on one's side. And the same with the various other gods of the regions above and below. In short, what the Greeks recognized behind a world of beauty was

personified forces. The gods themselves might not be particularly kindly, might not be especially good, but at least they could be communicated with. Nature was not divine in the sense that it reflected God's handiwork. It was not always good. Nature was an external world in which one lived, in which, perhaps, the highest form to be admired was the man of reason and discernment and understanding. And such a man would know how to search the skies and travel the wine-dark sea.

If one is reading Old English literature, one recognizes that nature takes on a somewhat different cast. (The predominant tone in Old English poetry is surely gray.) The poet deals with a world of action, a vigorous, masculine, virile, fighting world, but a world which is somber and stern and, eventually, a world in which one must go down--heroically, perhaps, but go down. It's a maritime world, and it's a northern world, and the choppy waves and gloomy seas are unfriendly and menacing. It's the gray sea and the gray winter of snow, hail, and hoar-frost, a world which tries one's endurance, which calls for the utmost in one's manhood, not a world of soft, gentle, tender romance. The world of nature is depicted in a poetry just as masculine, as vigorous, as strenuous, as the world in which these people lived. This is the world of nature that we recognize even when we read it only in translation, such as in Pound's version of "The Seafarer" which we encountered in our section not long ago.

More familiar to most of our students will be the world from Chaucer to the Elizabethans, a world vastly changed. Here the color, by and large, is no longer gray; it is green if anything. The typical season is not winter, but spring. No poet perhaps rejoices more over spring than does Chaucer himself: "Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote" or

Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe

That hast this wintres wedres overshake,
And driven away the longe nyghtes blake!

His lovers are lovers in the Maytime, his birds sing in the springtime, and like the language itself, the natural world seems to be waking up to new opportunities of joy and happiness.

And in the Elizabethan time nature was a backdrop against which a good deal could be written. We commonly say, in terms of literary history, that the first poem dealing specifically or totally with nature is Thomson's *Seasons,* in the eighteenth century. But a great deal of the poetry in Shakespeare's time, and that of his predecessors and immediate followers, deals with this nature, if not always for its own sake then as a reflection of the world in which a still largely rural people lived. Here was a storehouse of familiar images, a magazine of familiar sights: birds, trees, flowers, not unfamiliar to a people for whom the city was still a way of life which affected the few. There have been, I may say in passing, people on this side of the Atlantic to whom we owe little thanks, who have been determined to reproduce the world of Shakespeare, the nature of Shakespeare, in our country, and that bird which none of us have much liking for, the starling, is here as we know as a direct result of some misguided enthusiast's attempt to have in America all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's plays. But it did not seem artificial for Shakespeare, certainly, to compare the fading of life in his "Sonnet 73" to the fading of the sunset or the autumn of the year or the dying of the fire: the imagery of the "bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang" or the day that "after sunset fadeth in the west...." These would represent images that his readers would know and his fellow poets would use. A world still green, still lively, still rejoicing, in that season of Renaissance and Elizabethan *joie de vivre.*

For the writer in America, if we think of the seventeenth century, a colonial Puritan period, the view of nature is a little bit more complex, a bit more ambiguous, or ambivalent, if you will. And for the teacher of American literature, there are some complexities and perplexities to be faced here. How did the Puritan writer look at the world of nature? What shall we understand of his view of the external world in which he made his settlement? It was not, it seems to me, one single picture at all; there is rather something of a clash in his view of nature. On the one hand, the Puritan knew that this was God's world and that everything in it must be of God's creation. Thus one could echo the Psalmist in praising the beauty of God as seen in the sky, in the stars, on land and on sea. This is not the usual picture of the stereotype of the dour Puritan, but I think that it is a fair one of the Puritan in consequence of his theological commitment. And it would be a better picture, a fairer picture, of Jonathan Edwards in the eighteenth century to represent him, not by the overly anthologized "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," but rather by some of his passages rejoicing in the beauties of nature and finding the beauty of Christ in the singing of the birds, in the clouds, in the sky, in the sunshine, in the fragrance and delights of the outdoors. There is a lyrical side, a mystical side, of Edwards that many a reader has missed.

On the other hand there is no doubt that the Puritans had another view of nature, for they saw their appearance in this country as a great drama; they were the actors in what might be a last chance to work out God's monarchy on this earth. Europe they had been ready to give up as a lost cause, but here would be a new Zion, a city set on a hill, a place where God's chosen people could work out the destiny of a new world in a new world. But if there were forces of good, there were also forces of evil. God contended always with Satan, opponents sometimes seen in opposed

imagery of town and country which offered the same contrast as light and darkness, straight and crooked, so that one phase of the Puritans' symbolic reading of the aspects of the nature was a general agreement that the center of God's activity would be the community with the familiar straight street, the assigned houses along the street, the meeting house, the minister, the printed and spoken Word. This was a community of saints. Well, where would Satan be? He would be out in the forest, which tended to be also the domain of the Indians, savages, barbarians, heathens, Satan's own henchmen. In the forest, what might seem to be lovely was also dark and deep, and the paths through the forest were not straight roads, but sinuous and winding.

It is not surprising that Hawthorne, writing in the nineteenth century in a Puritan tradition, has Young Goodman Brown leave Salem in the evening, leave his wife and neighbors to proceed into the darkness of the forest path, where the farther he goes, the darker it gets. It's in the forest that he meets the Devil, it's in the forest that the saturnalian revels are held: the witches' dance, the various blasphemies and the desecration of the sacraments. This is a world of nature in which Satan lived. Thus the Puritan view, symbolic though it is, committed though it is to God's creation, also had room for the forces of nature being inimical to the forces of good, dangerous to man, opposed to God.

Eighteenth century views, as we well know, have represented nature as clockwork, and in both England and the late eighteenth-century America we see nature here depicted largely as reasonable machine, constructed by a Maker, a First Cause, who set the clockwork in order to more or less run itself. It was a world capable of being understood and codified, a universe of harmony, a universe of reason, an altogether admirable place. Nature was studied therefore, not because it was invested with some personality immediately capable of being reached, not because of its emotional,

spiritual overtones, but because of its reasonable display of the wonders of an Almighty Hand.

In the nineteenth century, as we recognize in the writings of the English romantics and also of the American romanticists of a slightly later time, the pendulum had swung backwards toward recognition of more spiritual, imaginative, emotional, transcendental forces in nature. Man seems to be unwilling to stay with one extreme or the other, and the totally rational aspect of nature could not satisfy for long; something more of spirit, something more of feeling, something more of the divine, perhaps, had to imbue it. Wordsworth is a writer, using the psychology of Hartley and Locke, who can find in nature the place to learn best. There is more to be learned of nature in a wise passiveness, where the lessons of nature can come through the organs of our sense, than in the secondhand world of books and men. And the point is that here nature is beneficent, nature can be trusted, nature can speak to us; all we have to do is listen and look and we learn.

In the America of Hawthorne's time such contemporaries as Emerson and Thoreau, transcendentalists both, would find in nature the possibility of communion with an Oversoul. They would also, like the Puritan tradition in which they moved in part, find nature constant symbol: objects embody spirit. They found in nature the possibility of communion with a spirit which had invested the world with meaning, which gave it life, and light, and joy. This did not rule out admiring the birds, animals, and all aspects of nature for their own sake. And Thoreau, who is said to have had an "edible religion," is possibly the finest example through which to introduce our own students to close observation of nature; let us follow Thoreau to Walden Pond, if we want to watch, day by day, the small animals and birds, the changes of the seasons, the appearance of the pond, crops that grow and are harvested. This is a world of close intimate communion

between man and nature, through which man can see in the cyclic seasons the deep spiritual principle of rebirth as spring succeeds winter. This is the place where man can find himself.

There were paradoxes in this same period in other writers, paradoxes, clashes, which were never really resolved. What, for example, is the world of nature in Cooper? It is a world which contains unresolved contradictions; for Cooper, a child of wealth, aristocracy, of good education, marrying a woman of the same tradition, was committed to the assumption that there were values in civilization and culture and learning that were great; these represented progress. He believed in them. On the other hand, he felt the same sense of loss that the old trapper does in *The Prairie* when he shakes his head mournfully upon hearing the sounds of the axes of the sons of Ishmael Bush. The trees go down to make way for advancing civilization, but this does not represent gain alone; progress comes, but with great loss.

This same movement of civilization, inevitable, and at the same time, pointing toward a kind of decay, can be seen in the work of Thomas Cole, especially in a series of allegorical paintings which represent the emergence of civilization from a pastoral state of high empire from which it declines to decay. The first picture in the series has nature so dominant that one can hardly see the presence of man there. By the time of the zenith of empire, man has so taken over the natural scene that one hardly sees trees and water anymore. At the end, when man and his have fallen, one sees the eagle once again beginning to build in the shattered columns, trees are growing back, the water can be seen once again; nature will remain, though man comes and goes.

The paintings of the Hudson River School present man finding moral significance in nature. Here man, properly dressed, is in touch with a kind of decent, civilized, Eastern nature, so to speak. "Kindred Spirits," Durand's famous

painting showing Bryant Cole, his painter friend, portrays two gentlemen in frock coats, enjoying a kind of respectable nature. The farther West one went in painting, the more distant the horizon, the vaster the perspective and scale, the smaller the human figures. By the time you get to the Rocky Mountain painting of Bierstadt, for example, you find a kind of glorified, romanticized West of mountain peaks and endless vistas, of waterfall and herds of buffalo. Man is tiny on this scale, the better to suggest the majesty and limitless resources of the American continent.

For many of our writers, nature provides a backdrop, a scene against which human destiny is played out: the ocean with its many possible readings in *Moby Dick,* the river in *Huckleberry Finn*--which Lionel Trilling, drawing from Eliot, feels is a strong, brown god. Nature is not always kindly, indeed, frequently is not. The nature of the disenchanted farmer is a harsh, cruel setting for human misery and degradation on the pages of Garland, or E.W. Howe. It is also the scene which we recognize in somewhat different guise in some writers of the twentieth century.

Not long ago in our section we were looking at the familiar "Dover Beach" of Matthew Arnold. But this is also the world, as Robert Penn Warren has pointed out, of Hemingway's heroes, though we may not always connect these writers directly. It's a world in which the sea of faith has ebbed, in which the eternal verities, values, standards, beliefs have gone. Arnold's famous pessimistic poem laments the passing of that certainty and tries to find in individual commitment something with which to shore up one's life. Hemingway's characters live in this world. Thus, for Hemingway, the world of nature holds no supernatural meaning: God does not speak through nature. Nature offers us something of artistic or aesthetic values in so far as it offers each man a possibility of working out a code of values of his own. It does, of course, speak to the senses. And since this world is

the only world we know, and its joys the only joys of which we can be sure, there is reason to appreciate the fishing trips in the high mountains of Spain, or in the upper peninsula of Michigan. There can be enjoyment in danger outdoors; there can be the enjoyment of the senses when one has the cool glass of wine against the hot, parched throat. There is the enjoyment of sleeping with a woman, the enjoyment of going down a fast stream in a boat, the enjoyment of hunting big game or watching the ritual of the bullfight. Nature, in short, is an arena of conflict and a source of sensuous enjoyment.

In our time, also, for Faulkner as well as for other writers, nature is part of a nostalgic look backward at a lost Eden, a paradise, a mythic innocence once apparently here, but ours no longer. For Faulkner, particularly in Part IV of "The Bear," but also elsewhere, the wilderness stands for the chance America had to be good, to be noble, to be as God would have wanted us to be before the exploitation of the wilderness, going hand in hand with the exploitation of man in the form of slavery, corrupted the opportunity we had and scarred and disfigured and defaced our world. The same theme of the loss of innocence appears in the very last paragraphs of *The Great Gatsby* where we look back to that fresh, green breast of the new world, as Hendrick Hudson might have found it. Now, in contrast, the valley of ashes, gray, garbage bits of our modern time. This same nostalgia for the freshness of nature that used to be here, but is no longer ours, can be seen in some of our books dealing with the West, such as Guthrie's *The Big Sky;* one can feel a nostalgia for a clean world of the trapper, the Popo Agie, the world of hardy mountain men.

In Robinson Jeffers, nature serves not only as the splendid setting for his own poetry, his home out there on the coastline of California, but as an indication of something better than man because it is less sensitive, less corrupt than thinking, conscious man. Man, says Jeffers, would be better

off to be a hawk than a man: more admirable, more savage, less weak and hypocritical; and better to be a stone than a hawk: less sensitive, less thinking, less conscious.

Perhaps a fairer reflection of the dilemma in which all of us, students and teachers, find ourselves could be reflected in a poem by Robert Frost, "The Oven Bird." The oven bird, he tells us, is a shy bird, not often seen but encountered and heard when one might least expect a glad bird song: namely, in the latter days of the summer, when the dust lies heavy on the hedges and the roadways. And the reflection that the poet gives about the song of the oven bird is possibly what we in the twentieth century must ask, must wonder about as we read the poetry of nature through the centuries; it is what to make of a diminished thing? This is the problem that we face, as we read the lyrical poetry and the other descriptions of nature given by the writers through the centuries. Now we encounter that world in a time when we are living in cities, when we have blotted out of existence and almost out of our consciousness that fresh paradise of Eden. How then are we to approach this world of nature? What can we make of this diminished thing?

This it seems to me, for every teacher in every classroom, is a continuing problem and a real challenge. But we had better try to meet nature in the pages of our writers, for before long that is the only place we are likely to find it.

Understanding
"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

by
Donald R. Fryxell

T. S. Eliot is one of the best known poets in the twentieth century. And yet, when "The Waste Land," which is Eliot's longest, his most difficult, and certainly his most controversial poem, was first published in the year 1922, T. S. Eliot was comparatively unknown, despite a volume of poetry he had written entitled *Prufrock and Other Observations,* which appeared in 1917, and which contained, among other poems, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In the years after "The Waste Land," Eliot's output was not particularly great in terms of the number of lines which he wrote or in terms of the number of poems which he wrote. And yet yearly his stature as a poet, as a critic, and as a dramatist grew so that today it has become almost heretical to say that he is not the foremost poet of the twentieth century. Eliot reached that stature partly because what he has had to say to the modern age seemed so peculiarly appropriate; partly because in his poems, in his plays, and in his essays, Eliot has traced the way out of the wasteland of the twentieth century; partly because the language of Eliot's poetry has come more and more to be the peculiarly appropriate idiom for the twentieth century; and partly because a host of critics and teachers have explicated Eliot's poems so frequently that what he has had to say has become reasonably well known and reasonably understandable. And this is what I am going to try to do with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," but I don't have the time to comment on every line or image within the poem.

All of Eliot's poems are essentially dramatic: they are either dramatic monologues, as is the "Love Song of J.

Alfred Prufrock" or dramatic lyrics, such as "Animula," for instance. All his poems are intensely concentrated pieces of intellectual and emotional conflicts, in which as in the metaphysical poems of the seventeenth century poet John Donne, for instance, emotion and thought are fused and made one. The difficulty for the average reader in the twentieth century comes in part, at least, in Eliot's avoidance in his poems of the normal transitions found in the past and his dependence within them upon a whole host of allusions. Too often, as a matter of fact, in the highly touted "Waste Land" these allusions are so plentiful and so obscure that reading the poem is like solving a literary crossword puzzle. The result is that the essential meaning of the poem, I think, gets lost in the forest of allusions and the lack of transitions within the poem.

Eliot's poems certainly are complex poems; they're never simple ones, and Eliot himself justified their complexity by arguing that the poet, who is to serve as the interpreter and critic of a complex age, must write complex poetry; and certainly, I think, we would all agree that our age is a complex age. Eliot's constant use of allusions in his poems is based upon his theory that the poet of today should write as if all the poets of the past were looking over his shoulder. The modern poet, then, must be conscious of the tradition which he has inherited, and he must carry on that tradition himself. "The Waste Land" is a cluttered mass of altered quotations; Eliot alters these quotations deliberately in order to suggest the loss of the vitality of the traditions of the past: poetic, moral, aesthetic, religious, social. It is the debasement of that tradition which has brought about the spiritual and the intellectual sterility of the modern age. And it is this wasteland of the twentieth century, this intellectual, spiritual, moral, aesthetic sterility which is the theme of the poem.

Allusion-jammed, though Eliot's poetry is, and dealing with complex emotions and complex ideas as he does, the

language of his poems is still concrete; the images which he uses are fresh; they are striking and never completely decorative. And so, for instance, in the "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" the evening is described as being spread out against the sky like a patient etherized upon a table. This image is fresh and striking; it is a most unusual kind of image, and the image is also functional: that image describes the passivity of the evening as Prufrock sees it. Of course, everything in the poem is seen through Prufrock's eyes. The image also describes something of the half-dead condition of Prufrock himself, who is helpless, finally, as is a patient who is etherized upon a table. Or take the description of the yellow fog as if it were a cat. That description is a striking, vivid image, describing the slow settling of the fog over the city, and it suggests possibly also Prufrock's renunciation of his decision to disturb his universe of dilettante ladies by bringing a breath of real life to them. "The fog," we are told, "curled once about the house, and fell asleep." And so, too, in the course of the poem, Prufrock allows his decision to fall asleep. The cat image, here, also, suggests sex. This is another desire of Prufrock which ends finally in inertia. Prufrock's failure in love is synonomous, you see, with the whole failure of society; his hopeless isolation is synonymous with the isolation of each trimmer from his fellow trimmers in Eliot's "Waste Land."

The vocabulary that Eliot uses in his poems will range from the obscure or foreign word, includng Sanskrit incidentally in "The Waste Land," to the slang of the pub or to the colloquialism of the everyday man or woman in the streets. Occasionally, despite his occasional learned quality, that vocabulary is the idiom of the twentieth century, and Eliot's occasional use of a rare word or foreign expression, helps, I think, to shock the reader into an awareness of what Eliot is doing, because that rare word or foreign expression is usually placed near an ordinary word and sometimes near

a slang expression. Eliot, like the French symbolists who influenced him greatly, experimented drastically in his poetry, but essentially Eliot still uses traditional rhythms and poetic devices; throughout "Prufrock" he uses the poetic refrain and repetitions with variations on the essential pattern. These are two devices which are nearly as old as poetry; however, in the hands of Eliot, they do take upon themselves a new vitality.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" concerns one of Eliot's Wastelanders. Prufrock is a member of the decadent aristocracy, just as Sweeney, in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," is representative of Eliot's proletariats in the *Prufrock* volume of poetry. The various characters that Eliot depicts in this, his first volume of poetry, are almost below the level, really, of animals and human beings. These characters seem to feel no real passions and they have no real thoughts; they are machines without the gas or oil that keeps a machine going. They run on momentum without a genuine spark of life within them. Prufrock himself is something of an exception, but not much of a one.

Prufrock lives in a world in which art and music have become the idle conversation of dilettante women, who are spiritually, sexually, and intellectually dead, who spend their lives in an eternal round of afternoon tea parties, who may talk of art because it is expected that the class to which they belong should know something about it, but for whom the meaning and the vitality of art have long since been drained in the cycle of their teacups. Prufrock is one of this group. Prufrock is a dilettante like "the women who come and go --- talking of Michaelangelo." Prufrock, we come to see, is as fastidious about his dress as they are, is as spiritually, sexually, and intellectually dead as they are. Like them, Prufrock has measured out his life "in coffee spoons," and his life has been as empty, as meaningless as theirs has been.

Prufrock is a trimmer. I trust that many of you, at

least, know that trimmers were those souls in Dante's *Inferno* who were condemned to the vestibule of hell because they had never really lived, although they were supposedly alive; but they never really did enough evil to be sentenced to hell, and they never did enough good while they were alive to get to purgatory to start their way up to heaven. The Trimmers were lifeless, spiritless, mindless people; and for the trimmers when the world ends, Eliot, in "Choruses from the Rock," gives a fitting epitaph when he writes this:

> Part III of "Choruses from the Rock,"
> lines 34-36.

For the trimmers in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the last line of their epitaph would have to be altered slightly to read, " . . .and a thousand drained tea cups." You see, we can't even imagine Prufrock playing golf.

Eliot uses Dante's trimmers in order to characterize the twentieth century. For Eliot, the vast majority of men and women of the twentieth century are trimmers: they are intellectually and spiritaully dead, afraid of life, afraid of living, afraid of facing either good or evil and of experiencing really either, afraid of taking sides either for or against God, living in a sterile land; breeding spiritually and intellectually sterile children, slaves to the machine and conventions of the age, fearful of speaking out against either, fearful of taking either the way which leads to spiritual regeneration or the way which leads to damnation.

Prufrock and the women referred to in his love song are trimmers, who differ from others in the "Waste Land" in that their economic and social status is different from that, say, of Sweeney's. Prufrock himself differs from the women in two ways. The first is that his sex is different; after all, he's supposed to be a man, and apparently Prufrock has had at least a glimpse of something more vital in life than they

have. And it's this glimpse, this insight into a different kind of life which he wants to give them and thus to disturb their universe. But before the end of the poem, Prufrock is emasculated, and he renounces forever his plan of disturbing the world that he knows.

The "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a song of defeat, of despair; it is the song of a man who gives up forever, knowing that although the mermaids who sing the song of life and of whom he has had a glimpse do not really sing after all to him. It is the song of a man who comes to see that he is only the Polonius of his little world, not its Hamlet. He is fit, like Polonius, to be an attendant lord, one that would do

Lines 116 to 122

J. Alfred Prufrock is no Hamlet who will disturb and rectify the evil of his world, the evil which consists for Prufrock in its decadence, its spiritual, moral, intellectual, sexual, aesthetic sterility. Hamlet can cleanse the rottenness of Denmark; Prufrock can get only a glimpse of the sterility of this world, but he is helpless to do anything about it. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is thus his swan song to life, but it's also a song that he himself sings, for the poem is a dramatic monologue. He sings it in an effort to justify himself for not following the impulses, the suppressed desires of his alter-ego. And the effort damns him. But because the poem also shows that he has come to know his own inadequacies, to know that he is a trimmer, I think finally we do pity J. Alfred Prufrock. I always have.

Prufrock, the fastidious dilettante, shows not only his

pathetic deadness but his cowardice, his fear of the eyes and the words of the women with whom he associates, his apprehension regarding the bald spot in the middle of his head, his concern with his digestion, his pride in his dress, his inadequacies as a prophet of the rebirth of life which his particular world needs. He is no John the Baptist who comes to see, to herald the coming of a savior. Instead he fears the remarks of the women about his bald spot, and he knows that their footman, like the eternal footman, Death, has looked upon him and snickered.

Eliot builds his poem around the repetition of three central themes or motifs. The first of these is the time theme. This is given in the refrain, "And indeed there will be time." The time theme serves as an excuse for Prufrock for not disturbing his universe, for there is always time to put things off, as talking to his alter-ego--the "you" in the "Let us go now, you and I" -- he shows that he will put off telling these women, and he will put off revealing his suppressed desires, apparently, for one of these women. There is always a tomorrow, there is always time, as Prufrock says,

Lines 27 to 34

And there will be time for Prufrock to change his mind about disturbing his universe; there will be time for Prufrock to put off doing it forever; there will be time to say farewell to the glimpse of real life he has had. There will be time for Prufrock to sink back eternally among the rounds of teacups.

The second theme of Prufrock is the "Do I dare" theme,

in which Prufrock questions his ability to disturb his universe. This theme, allied as it is with the first theme and with the third theme as all three are allied one with the other, underscores the essential spiritual and moral cowardice of this man. Deliberately, Eliot has Prufrock begin this theme with a grandiose question when Prufrock asks, "Do I dare disturb the universe?" But before the end of the poem, this question degenerates into "Do I dare to eat a peach?" This symbolizes in its degeneration not only Prufrock's moral cowardice but also his essential concern with himself, from the outgoing desire to aid others in the question "Do I dare disturb the universe?" to the ingoing concern with his digestion.

The third theme is one of world weariness, which is begun in the line "For I have known them all already, known them all." This theme underscores Prufrock's weariness with the life that he leads, which is shown most effectively in the line "For I have measured out my life with coffee spoons." As Eliot develops this theme, he shows also Prufrock's bondage to the life which he is so weary of and his inability to bring any life to the half-alive world in which he lives. This theme is modified to stress Prufrock's renunciation of his plan. Prufrock must find some excuse for not doing what he, or rather, I should say, what his alter-ego, had hoped to do; and so he finds it by rationalizing that it would not have been worthwhile after all to bring his breath of life into the sterile world, that he would have been misunderstood, that to bring life into this world he would have had to be like Lazarus come to life, "Come back to tell you all." But he is not a John the Baptist, not a Hamlet. He is only, finally, a pathetic trimmer, J. Alfred Prufrock, growing old, with a bald spot in the middle of his hair, which he is going to try to conceal from the prying eyes of the women of his circle. He's only J. Alfred Prufrock, who has had a vision of life, but who comes to see that the mermaids who sing the song of life, of rebirth from the deadness and emptiness off his universe, do not sing to him. He is only J. Alfred Pru-

frock, who has lingered for a few minutes by the chambers of the sea, which could have brought a rebirth of life to him, which could have made it possible for him to be like Lazarus raised from the dead, but who has been awakened by the human voices of his women--that is, these half-alive, intellectually and spiritually sterile female trimmers--and who has been drowned by their voices commenting about the bald spot in the middle of his hair.

These interlocking and interweaving themes help to unify the poem. The epigraph which precedes this poem, unifies the poem also. As always in the poetry of Eliot, in the "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" the epigraph is important. And as is frequently true of his poetry, the epigraph here is taken from Dante. This epigraph comes from lines 61-66 of the 27th Canto of the *Inferno,* where the flame of Guido is asked to identify himself. The flame replies in this way, "If I thought my answer were to one who could ever return to this world, this flame should shake no more, but since none ever did return alive from this depth, if what I hear be true, without fear of infamy I answer thee." If you remember your Dante, you will remember that the eighth bolgia or ditch, in the eighth circle of the *Inferno,* is given over to evil counselors, and their punishment is to be concealed in flames. Despite Guido's reluctance to name himself, he has just before this spoken rather rudely and rather harshly to the two travellers in Hell, Dante and Virgil, and Guido does tell his story to them. Eliot uses this epigraph, in part, to suggest the tone of this poem, which is at once mocking and serious. Prufrock is an inept ridiculous person--he is as ridiculous, by the way, as his name, and there are probably no more ridiculous names than "J. Alfred Prufrock."

The ridiculous is part of the tone of the poem; on the other hand, it is true that the condition of this trimmer and the defense which he gives do reflect the sterility of the

twentieth century. Guido's false counsel was to advise Pope Boniface to promise a great deal but not to fulfill many of his promises, and for this advice, this former friar and monk was placed in Hell by Dante. The "you" in Prufrock, like Guido, would be the counsellor in his world; however, as the "I" in Prufrock argues, his counsel would be as foolish, finally, as the advice that Polonius gives in *Hamlet.*

In the poem, Prufrock finds his excuse for not disturbing his universe, because in the words of Guido, "None ever did return alive from this death." But Prufrock, in answering his alter-ego, his suppressed self--the "you" in "Let us go then you and I"--can answer the "you" without fear of being exposed, because none has ever returned alive from the depths of the psychological drama which is carried on in this poem between the "I" on the one hand of Prufrock and the "you" on the other hand. Prufrock returns from the depths of the psychological drama, figuratively speaking, dead, and the advice that he gives, you see, is locked up forever in himself.

The "I" at the beginning of the poem is the objective part of the duality which constitutes J. Alfred Prufrock; the "you," as George Williamson has observed, "is the amorous self, the sex instinct, direct and forthright, but now suppressed by the timid self, finding, at best, evasive expression, always opposed by fear of the carnal which motivates the defensive analogy. It is to this buried self that Prufrock addresses himself and excuses himself. His love song is the song of a being divided between passion and timidity; it is never sung in the real world, for this poem develops the theme of frustration, of emotional conflict, dramatized by the "you" and 'I.' "

Characteristic of Eliot's poems, the "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" contains a number of literary allusions. Here, the literary allusions are far less numerous than they are in "The Waste Land," but as in "The Waste Land" they function in developing the overall psychological drama found

within the poem. Some of these allusions are very obvious, such as the reference to Hamlet or the reference to Polonius or the reference to John the Baptist. Other allusions, I think, however, are somewhat less noticeable, like the reference to Hesiod's book *Works and Days,* found in the line, "and time for all the works and days of hands." Hesiod had addressed his book to his brother, Perses, urging his brother to toil; in Eliot, the reference becomes an ironic commentary upon Prufrock's inability to toil, to disturb his universe. And I trust that my students at least caught the reference to Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." It's found in these lines: "To have squeezed the universe into a ball To roll it toward some overwhelming question." The lines of Marvell which Eliot echoes are these: "Let us roll all our strength and all Our sweetness up into one ball." These lines are found in the conclusion to Marvell's witty and lascivious argument to his coy mistress not to be so coy, but to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh while they can because time is running out. In Prufrock, the lines end in frustration; it would never have been worthwhile for Prufrock, so he argues, to be like Lazarus, to rise from the dead to disturb the universe of his dilettante women. In Marvell, the lines suggest life and the pleasures of life; in Eliot, they suggest death, frustration, sexual repression.

Again, as is typical with Eliot's poetry, in the "Love Song" there is a pattern of images which run throughout the poem in order to help give unity to it. And so the cat image, which I have called attention to already, in the description of the fog--the cat which curled "once about the house and fell asleep"--is suggested later in the lines

Lines 75 to 78

A sea image is at least suggested in line 7 of the poem in the line "And sawdust restaurants with oyster shells." Oysters become crabs, as later Prufrock incongruously wishes, "I should have been a pair of ragged claws Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." And the sea image becomes dominant at the end of the poem as Prufrock fancies himself walking on the beach with white flannel trousers and sees that although he has heard the mermaids singing, they have not sung to him. Instead he has lingered in the chambers of the sea until he is jarred out of his dream world by the intruding reality of human voices which wake the "you" and the "I"; thus the desires of the "you" are drowned as Prufrock reveals his frustrations and his total inability to disturb his universe.

There are other patterns and images, such as the street image, for instance, but the ones I've mentioned will give you, I trust, an idea of Eliot's pattern of images. And finally, since my time is more than up, let me comment on Eliot's use of just one rhyme within the poem, found in these lines: "Should I, after tea and cakes and ices, Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?" The two words which rhyme, of course, are "ices" and "crisis," and the rhyming of these two words is deliberately ridiculous, as ridiculous as Prufrock is himself at times, as ridiculous as Prufrock certainly is here: he's a sexually repressed man, growing old, with a bald spot in the middle of his hair, who can't, you see, even rise to any kind of passion. Thus, his love song can never be anything but a song of frustration, of despair; it can never be sung to anyone except the "you," and the wishes and the desires of that "you" lose to the "I," who has revealed why the "you" in Prufrock's monologue can never dominate the man's actions.

The Class-Made Film as a Motivation to Writing

by

Arthur R. Huseboe

Like other good high-school teachers, you have long since discovered that the best way to avoid discipline problems in class is also the best way to teach--by developing the students' interest in what you would have them learn, by motivating them to want to read, to write, and to sharpen their ability to evaluate both their reading and their writing. But no English teacher in these dark days can be entirely satisfied that he has motivated all of his students to want to learn. In particular he recognizes that in the last few years the most dangerous threat to his classroom effectiveness has emerged, in the form of television. It threatens teaching effectiveness, very simply, because through it the student is now thoroughly oriented to the visual media and because the teacher is not able to compete with those media--unless he can produce his own.

The problems that face the English instructor who wants to make use of television and films in teaching are directly related to the nature of the competition that faces him--the Lighted Rectangle. The fifteen-year-old in your classroom has spent as many hours in front of a television set as you and I have spent in class in all the years of our formal education. By the time he was five he had already clocked some 4,000 hours in front of his electronic baby sitter, and he has added something close to a thousand more hours each year to his total.

By the time he graduates from high school, your student has absorbed--at a rough estimate--16,000 hours of news, cartoons, sex, violence, and advertising (the categories are by no means mutually exclusive). The bulk of that time has been spent watching commercial television, and for three very

obvious reasons. First, educational television is still a rare bird in our part of the country, and, second, where it can be found it tends to be inferior to its commercial competitior because it lacks the resources to compete. ETV presents programs in color far less frequently than does commercial television, and it relies heavily on the talking face or the panel of talking faces to convey its message. Third, and finally, ETV is unsatisfactory simply because it is inconvenient, and it will remain so until every school can afford a color t.v. recorder that can preserve good programs presented at one time for use later on. Even when good programs are available during school hours, the English teacher will always have difficulty fitting them into his unit plans.

Similar difficulties face the teacher who would make in-class use of films, filmstrips, and slides as means of motivating his students. The time is long gone when films succeeded through sheer novelty, and teachers could require the entire student body to watch, for example, "The Epic of the Locomotive" so that they could then squeeze assignments out of it for the next two weeks. Furthermore, even the best educational films today are poor stuff to the student who spends twenty to thirty hours a week in front of a color t.v. set, watching five-thousand dollar ads and fifty-thousand dollar programs. Professional film-makers, as a matter of fact, estimate the cost of high-quality films and television programs at about $50,000 for each fifteen minutes. Regardless of what you may think of the programs themselves, today's television is technically superb, with much of the best work to be seen in the commercials, produced--as they are--by some of the most creative minds in American advertising.

Finally, the teacher who would like to use good educational films is faced with additional problems: how is he to select from the rapidly expanding catalogue of acceptable films, video tapes, and other audio-visual materials? What

equipment will he need, where can he find the money, how soon will it be before the equipment is outmoded, and how can he keep both materials and equipment accessible and useable?

One way to meet the competition of commercial television is through the production of better films and video tapes for English teachers. We need direction by Alfred Hitchcock, color and animation by Disney, and a cast of thousands drawn from professional theatre. We need the best English teachers as production consultants and financing by the Ford Foundation.

What can be done in the meantime? That is, what can be done for the next fifty years to fill the gap? All of us will have to rely increasingly upon the advice of reviewers in selecting effective educational films from the mushrooming supply. Film reviews in such periodicals as *English Journal, A-V Instructor, Educational Screen,* and *Saturday Review* can be of some assistance, although the classroom teacher must remain hard pressed to keep aware of worthwhile additions, much less find the means and the time to make effective use of older films of high quality.

One solution to the media gap is the class-made film. It cannot impart information as well as a high-quality color movie or television program, but it is perhaps most successful of all in stimulating students to want to read and write. A class-film project can offer every student a chance to participate, even those who are ordinarily unresponsive in the classroom--the terminal senior, the perpetual delinquent, the slow reader, and so on. Each one can be involved in that part of the production that appeals to his particular interest--whether acting, set designing, photography, scriptwriting, technical work, or whatever. Your student is not likely to make unfavorable comparisions between the class-made production and commercial television (as he would between

commercial television and ETV) because he's in it or because he has had some part in its production. He is more willing to do the necessary reading in literature and the writing about it when he has been intimately connected with the process of transferring it from the printed page to the silver screen.

The two most obvious difficulties in film-making--time and money--can now be easily overcome, thanks to the new inexpensive and easy-to-operate super 8 cameras on the market. The production of a ten- or fifteen-minute movie can now be undertaken by any group of teenagers under reasonable supervision, in no more than a few hours of class time and at a cost as low as $1.00 for each minute of color film. Since the purpose of such a production is to motivate students to want to read and write and to involve all of them in the process, the completed film is not likely to win any awards for its makers, but it will offer opportunities for writing assignments on process, and the original narrative will suggest topics for themes developed by comparison and contrast.

The steps involved in producing a class-made film are few and uncomplicated. The first is to introduce the students to the idea of making a movie based on the literature they will be reading. Most of them will have used cameras of various kinds and some may have operated movie cameras, and so the idea will not be a totally new one. Since the production time involved from start to finish is likely to be two to three weeks, you will need to start them fairly early in the task of selecting the work to be translated into cinematic form. It is possible, of course, to base a film on lyric verse or on a short narrative poem. A more challenging task is to transfer some type of longer narrative onto film--short story, play, or a portion of a novel. However you involve the students in the choice of a suitable literary work, you will find that they will need guidance in choosing material that does not pose

insurmountable problems in costuming, setting, casting, and the like.

The second step is to transform the selected work into a film script. Although a movie of any length is possible, matters of time and expense suggest a length of from ten to fifteen minutes (or three to five rolls of film). In a class of twenty-five students there will generally be at least two or three competent writers who can be induced to volunteer to undertake the devising of a script. My own experience with eighteen-year-olds has been that initial reluctance develops rapidly into enthusiasm as possibilities for dramatic action begin to emerge. Your script writers will have learned more than they realize from the countless movies and television programs they have absorbed. If you intend to synchronize dialogue and lip movement, your writers have no special problem; but if you plan to follow the simpler course of taping a *narration* to accompany the action, then they will have to place a page of running commentary and filming directions beside each page of dialogue.

Once the script is completed (with your revisions), you can select--or the class can elect--a director, and with his assistance the script writers and you can select the cast. There are, in addition, a number of other tasks to occupy the rest of the class. These should be made voluntary as far as is possible since the chief purpose of the class-made film is to gain the student's willing involvement in the process. You will need a cameraman, two or more students to handle lighting, two or more to operate the tape recorder, several students to gather music and sound effects and to produce them at the appropriate times in the taping, several students to be responsible for costumes, several to take charge of properties, and two or three students to produce the film credits and to assist you in splicing the film.

Once the staff assignments have been made, the students should begin their work with as much direction as you feel

necessary. Your task in the interval will be to time the scenes in the script as well as you can so that you can purchase the necessary amount of super 8 film--a fifty-foot roll for each three minutes and twenty seconds of script.

Let's assume that you have selected a one-act comedy and that your re-writers have reduced it to a twelve-minute script. Let's assume further that you will do your filming indoors, with lights, and that you have decided to tape a narration with sound effects rather than try to synchronize the taped dialogue with lip movements. Before the filming can begin, you'll need to assemble the necessary equipment.

Camera. This is the heart of your movie-making. I have found the Kodak Instamatic M-18 highly satisfactory: it is inexpensive (about $65.00), its manual zoom lens enables you to move in close on your subject without changing camera location, it is battery operated, and the electric eye means that light adjustment is automatic.

Tripod. If your budget will stretch no further, you can hold the camera by hand or rest it on a file cabinet or book-case; but if you can afford an inexpensive tripod ($15.00-20.00), you will find your work much simpified.

Lights. How you light your actors is almost as important as the camera: you can hardly have too much light, and more is always better than not enough. For small group scenes I have found two 650 watt sealed beam movie lights (Sunset Beamette 77, $6.95 each) quite adequate; use one or more additional lights for larger groups or for very dark sets. Lights can be hand held by your lighting crew (they get pretty hot) or mounted out of camera range.

Sound equipment. If you are going to attempt synchronization later on, it is wise to have your sound man tape record all dialogue as the action is filmed so that you can preserve exactly what is said. Any kind of portable recorder is

adequate for this purpose since you wish only to make a new typescript from the tape. For the final taping, however, you will want to use the best recorder available; most schools own a good one. My own experience has been limited to the use of the Wollensak 1500, a two-track two-speed (3 3/4, 7 1/2 inches per second) monophonic recorder using 1/4 inch tape. Its one limitation is that it is equipped with only one microphone; hence it is almost impossible to make a final tape of dialogue and sound effects at the same time that you do the filming.

The actual filming can be done all at once, or it can be spread out over several days; but you can expect a fifteen-minute film to take at least two hours to complete. Whether you film continuously or extend the work over a week or two, you will find it most satisfactory to film the script in a series of very brief scenes or takes, beginning with the film credits. Our most recent twelve-minute film, for example, was divided for convenience into eighteen short takes.

In order to illustrate some simple but effective camera techniques, let us film the first seven scenes of the one-act comedy selected by your class. The set is in order, the actors have been rehearsed and are in costume, and lights and camera are ready.

Take 1, credits. We can shoot these, of course, at any time and splice them into the film, but the students who prepared the half dozen credit cards will appreciate having their work publicly incorporated into the movie, and the rest of the class will enjoy seeing their names and responsibilities on display. The cards themselves can be 8 1/2 x 11 sheets tacked to the bulletin board. Lettering should be dark and bold capitals--at least 1/2 inch high--no closer than 1 1/2 inches to any margin, and well spaced. The cards should be brightly lighted with one or two 650 watt lamps. With the zoom lens control set for wide-angle filming (we don't zoom

in), we position the camera about twenty inches away, the focusing ring set at six feet. At this close range we will need to aim the camera a little higher than and a little to the left of the middle of each credit sheet in order to compensate for the off-center location of the view finder lens in the camera. We shoot each card for as many seconds as it will take our audience to read slowly through the credits. Note: Be certain to insert the filter key whenever you film indoors, or your developed film will be somewhat darker than desirable.

Take 2, two neighbors meeting, long shot. Before we film this first brief scene in the comedy, we will want to include a few inches of black film to separate the credits and the beginning of the action. When we have finished the credits, the cameraman simply places his hand over the lens and runs the camera for one or two seconds. You may wish to separate all of your scenes in this way as an aid to splicing later on. The long shot helps the audience orient themselves to the situation. Hence, we will want to show the actors full-length and will want to include as much of the setting as possible. We place the camera at the appropriate distance, set the lens for that distance, and begin to film. The actors approach each other, meet, and exchange greetings. Then we stop the action and the camera and move in closer for the next scene.

Take 3, two neighbors, medium shot. The medium shot now concentrates upon the two actors, showing them--let us say--from the waist up. It leads the audience to focus their attention on the center of interest in the scene, two neighbors in animated conversation. After several seconds of filming, the camera can now move to the next scene.

Take 4, two neighbors, close-up. The close-up emphasizes detail, in this case the faces of the two speakers as their conversation increases in tempo. With the camera at this close range (four to five feet), facial expressions can be captured clearly but bodily action is limited.

Take 5, cutting in the camera. In order to concentrate attention upon each actor in turn, we now move in for a series of extreme close-ups (at about 30 inches), showing first one neighbor's face and then the other's. To accomplish this feat we simply move the camera in, focus on one face, film the speech, stop filming, swivel the camera to the other face, film the speech, stop filming, swivel back to the first neighbor, and so on. (The kind of abrupt stop in filming is called a cut or a straight cut.)

Take 6, panning. The conversation ended, Neighbor One turns and leaves. With the camera at medium distance, we follow him off--as slowly and as smoothly as possible--and then stop the camera as he disappears from sight.

Take 7, zooming. Still at medium distance, we return the camera to Neighbor Two (as he reacts to his friend's departure) and begin to film. As Two turns toward the camera, we slowly zoom in on him so as to catch his facial expression. Zooming--like panning and the long shot--can be a very useful technique, in this case directing the audience to find special meaning in Neighbor Two's reaction. But--like panning and the long shot--it is easily over done or badly done and ought to be used with great discretion.

Our filming of these seven scenes has taken no more than four or five minutes of film time, but in them it has been possible to demonstrate as many of the filming techniques as you will need in order to produce a satisfactory movie. Other techniques will occur to you as you gain experience in film-making, and there are, of course, excellent books available on film production--some of them free for the asking at photography shops.

The processing of the super 8 cartridges will take about a week. When you have them all in hand, you are ready to begin splicing. Although a film editing machine is useful, you will find it as simple to use a rented super 8 projector.

First, arrange the rolls of film in order and number them for convenience. Mount the first, run it until the film is completely wound on the take-up reel, and with a scissors cut off the excess so that the last take is at the end of the film. Now mount the second roll and cut off the excess film so that the beginning of the next take is at the end.

Making the splice is no more difficult than putting a band-aid on a scratch: overlap the two ends in a splicing machine (plastic, made by BAIA for under $1.00), cut them, and put a splice tape on each side of the film. Continue with the remaining rolls in the same way. As you view the complete movie for the first time, you will notice points at which you will want to do further editing. With the splicer you can add a bit of black film here (to create a space between two scenes) and cut out a mistake there. It is possible, and perhaps even desirable, to film the credits last and then splice them in at the beginning, or to alter the order in which you film other scenes; the more splicing you do, however, the more convenient an editing machine will be.

The final step in the production of a class-made film is the addition of sound. You will need to instruct your sound crew, of course, in the use of the tape recorder, and with their help you will select a suitable room for the taping session. A little experimenting will show the best arrangement for the narrator, the microphone, and the phonograph that will provide suitable music. If you have already timed the finished movie from start to finish, you will now need to time the narration, the musical introduction and conclusion, and any musical bridges. Next you will run through the film for practice two or more times, in order to fit sound and action together and in order to adjust background music to the right level. As a matter of fact, you may even wish to tape the rehearsals: through listening to your rehearsal, you and the students will have a better idea of the adjustments needed. Finally, you decide on a suitable tape, wind it back on a

three-inch reel for convenient storage, cut it from the larger reel (leaving twelve inches or so of lead-in tape), and you are ready to present the finished product to the class.

With a little more daring you can attempt a tape that is roughly synchronized with the actors' lip movements and actions. One way to do this is to tape record the sound rack of the movie as you film it. Doing so means starting and stopping the camera and recorder simultaneously for each take; and because perfect coordination is impossible, you will need to rent or borrow a three-speed projector so that at each showing the projectionist can keep the film and tape in coordination by increasing or decreasing the projetion speed. An additional problem is obtaining good-quality sound. This is most serious when there is much movenent in the dramatization and only one microphone. The way to obtain satisfactory sound in that case is to use a recorder with more than one mike or to attach an extension cord to the single mike and extend it on a pole so that your sound man can hold it close at all times to the speakers. You will also need a student to man the off-on switch and another to control the volume. Only experience can suggest refinements in this method of producing a sound-track.

A second approach to synchronization is to tape the sound after the filming is finished. Its chief advantage over the previous method is the better quality of sound posible, but it comes no closer to achieving exact synchronization. It can be much less successful, as a matter of fact, when the student actors make those inevitable--though unintentional--modifications of the original script as you do the filming. Thus, when you attempt to coordinate the film and aped sound, you find the script and the lip movements in frequent disagreement. In order to solve this problem, you will need to tape the movie as it was filmed and then make a new script from the tape.

To add sound, group the actors around the microphone and arrange the screen so that they can see it clearly. You will also need a light above and behind them so that they can see their scripts. Good results can be obtained by stopping the projector and the tape recorder at the end of each take; this is achieved quite easily if you have separated your takes from each other with a few inches of black film. The final result will again be only roughly synchronized, and the projectionist will have to vary projection speed in order to improve the coordination.

The simplest and best way to synchronize the sound for your class-made film is--of course--much more expensive, requiring the use of a super 8 sound projector that will enable you to record sound on magnetically striped film as well as play it back. Striping your finished film will cost about 6¢ per foot; you then add sound with the microphone and recording device built into the projector. Although this method eliminates the problem of keeping the tape player and the projector in coordination, you will still be unable to get your actors to match their reading with the lip movements on the screen.

If your school is fortunate enough to have video-taping equipment that you can use, you will be able to produce a class-made film without any worry about synchronization. But unless the unit is equipped with more than one microphone, you will still have difficulty obtaining satisfactory sound. Furthermore, video-taping outfits are extremely expensive in comparison with super 8, starting at about $1,500; they reproduce only in black and white, are more difficult to edit, and lack the portability and flexibility of the light-weight, battery-powered super 8 camera.

But the point of the class-made film is not the achieving of technical excellence; as you have seen by now, the product resulting from any of these approaches will be full of flaws.

Nothing will go entirely right in your production: the actors will muff their entrances, exits, and lines; scenes will be out of focus; and the tape recording will occasionally sound as if it were intended for some other movie. Nevertheless, your students will have been totally involved in the process and will be delighted with the result. The more responsibility they have taken, the more enthusiastic their reaction. And there will be pleasant surprises for you: the color will be better than you had thought possible, some of the acting will appear almost inspired, and the whole will have a fresh vitality that will charm the parents and fellow teachers who have a chance to view the final product.

Most important, you will have taken a step forward in meeting the competition of commercial television. Your English students will now be more conscious of the ways in which movies and t.v. interpret written material; they will have been moved to read more closely in the work to be filmed; and all of them, even those ordinarily least responsive, will be more willing to write--to describe their roles in the production, to evaluate the finished movie, and to compare it with the original.

And for you--not only will the project have been as memorable an experience for you, but the whole realm of instructional media will have lost a little of its mystery, and you will be better prepared and more eager for new adventures with film-making and with other, more challenging, experiments in student motivation.

Notes on the Contributors

C. W. Geyer, who is an associate professor of English at Augustana, has begun to establish for himself a reputation as a writer in the spirit of the early American humorists whom he admires. His earlier essay, "American Literature and the Curriculum" (which appeared first in *English Notes* and was recently reprinted in *The Indiana English Journal*), fairly radiates the same good-cheer-in-the-face-of-adversity that is the real charm of "Chicken Feathers." He received the Ph. D. from Auburn University, where he was elected to Phi Kappa Phi honorary. For two years he was a Danforth Teacher at Auburn and since 1967 has been in charge of the American literature program at Augustana.

Gerhard T. Alexis, professor of English and past department chairman at Gustavus Adolphus College, was graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Minnesota and received a Ph. D. from the same institution. In twenty-five years of college teaching, Dr. Alexis has had responsibility for a wide variety of courses--at Minnesota, Winona State College, St. Olaf College, and Gustavus. He has published articles and reviews in *College English, The Christian Scholar, Scandinavian Studies, Explicator, American Quarterly, Church History, Lutheran Quarterly, Lutheran Libraries,* and *Choice.* During 1962 he was an ETV lecturer in American Studies for KTCA-TV, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and in the spring of 1967 moderated a ten-man panel for the McKnight Foundation in naming the best English teacher and the outstanding student in Minnesota.

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New Mexico State, Auburn, Wayne State, Gustavus Adolphus College, Augustana College, and Kentucky. From 1965 to 1968 he served as state chairman of the National Council of Teachers of English Achievement Awards Program. Since 1953 he has been professor of English and chairman of the department at Augustana, and since 1965 he has also been chairman of the Humanities Division. He has spoken before groups of high-school English teachers and has published articles in *Notes and Queries, Discourse, The Midwest Review,* and *English Notes.* In the summer of 1967 he was visiting professor of English at the University of Kentucky.

Arthur R. Huseboe, editor of the monograph and director of the NDEA English institute in which these papers were first prepared, has directed the production of four class-made films, both with college students and with institute participants. In 1968 he attended an NDEA special media institute at the University of Southern California, and in the summer of 1969 directed an EPDA (Education Professions Development Act) English institute at Augustana. He holds the Ph. D. in English from Indiana University (where he was a Strauss Fellow), with a dissertation on *Alexander Pope's Dramatic Imagination.* He is the recipient of grants from the American Philosophical Society and from The American Lutheran Church, is editor-in-chief of *English Notes,* and has published over thirty articles, reviews, and poems.